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SELF-CULTIVATION.

AN

ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE SOCIETY OF THE ALUMNI

OF THE

COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON,

AT THEIR

ANNIVERSARY, FEBRUARY 25TH, 1851.

BY W. D. PORTER,

A MEMBER.



[PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE SOCIETY.]

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CHARLESTON:

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1851.

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MARCH 10, 1851.

DEAR SIR:

At a meeting of the Society of the Alumni of the College of Charleston, held this afternoon, the undersigned were appointed a Committee to convey to you the following resolution which was adopted:

"*Resolved*, That the thanks of the Society be tendered to the Hon. Wm. D. Porter, for his very able and eloquent address delivered before them at their late anniversary, and that a Committee be appointed to request of him a copy for publication."

It affords us sincere pleasure to communicate the wishes of the Society; and we hope that a production which, at the time of its delivery, gave such great and unqualified satisfaction, may be placed in a permanent form, by your furnishing us with a copy for publication, at your earliest convenience.

Very respectfully,

JOS. T. LEE.  
H. D. LESESNE.  
JAS. W. MAY.

To Hon. W. D. PORTER.

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MARCH 11, 1851.

GENTLEMEN:

I have received your note, communicating a resolution passed by the Society of the Alumni of the College of Charleston, in which they request for publication a copy of the address delivered before them upon the occasion of their late anniversary.

I could wish that the Address were worthier of this compliment; but such as it is, I place it at their disposal.

Please accept for yourselves personally, the assurances of my esteem and respect.

Your obedient servant,

W. D. PORTER.

Messrs. Jos. T. LEE, H. D. LESESNE, JAMES W. MAY.



## ADDRESS.

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THIS is our festival day! A pious duty, as well as a pleasant custom brings us together on this occasion. Years have glided by since most of us, elate with the hopes of youth, took leave of the calm retreats of the College, to enter upon the active and stirring scenes of life. Diverse have been our paths, and variously hath fortune dealt with us since those days; but there is a bond of union between us, which the chances and changes of time cannot altogether sever, and which it is the aim of this Association to draw closer and render stronger with each recurring year. We are all the foster-children of Alma Mater! In turn, we have bowed to her discipline, and felt her tender cares; we have sojourned in her halls, spending laborious hours and days in

“ Search of deep philosophy,  
Wit, eloquence and poesy,  
Arts which we loved ;”—

and as often as this day of commemoration rolls around, so often shall memory, still faithful to the past, call up to view images and scenes dear to recollection, because associated with many an early joy, and many a youthful aspiration. And though, now, as at all times, there should be in the retrospect, something of sadness and regret for departed pleasures which can never return, and for hopes, perhaps two ardent, hardly realized; still shall the prevailing sentiment of our hearts be one of deep thankfulness to our academic mother for the solicitude with which she trained us to whatever of acqui-

sition or usefulness we have since been able to attain. Long, long, may the College, which looks out upon the ocean, flourish in modest but generous rivalry of that, which, like some crowning glory, sits upon a hill in the centre of our State!

There are other pleasures, too, which this occasion brings with it. Not only does it revive old and agreeable recollections, but it gives us the opportunity of forming new associations and new friendships with those who have passed through the same probation as ourselves. Already has a fresh band of Alumni just issued from the portals of the College; the hopes of youth are beating high at their hearts, and the kindly offices of friends are strewing their path-way with flowers. The eye of the mother glistens with a quick emotion, as she bids her boy, the pride of her heart, God-speed on his way; while the father looks forward with a more calculating, but yet hopeful confidence to the distinction into which the early promise of his son may well be expected to ripen. Fortunate young men! to have enjoyed the benefits of a liberal culture, and to have begun the journey of life under such happy auspices! Over how many thousands of your fellow-citizens have you been distinguished by these superior advantages, and by what an increased weight of obligation are you constrained to render them available for good! May the germs of excellence that have already unfolded themselves in your minds find a shelter from the blight of the world, and ripen in due season into rich and golden fruits! For ourselves, we meet you with a cordial greeting, and bid you welcome, as a worthy accession, to the growing ranks of our brotherhood.

How full of interest is the situation of an intelligent and ingenuous young man, just about to enter upon the stage of active life. Hitherto he has been trained and guided by others, but now the whole responsibility of his education is to be devolved upon himself. Hitherto his lessons have been learned chiefly from books, but now experience, derived from actual contact with men and things, is to give discipline to his mind, and shape and consistency to his character. Before him lies the world, with its infinite diversity of pursuits and enterprises ; its hopes, excitements, temptations and struggles ; its glittering rewards, and its cruel, heart-crushing disappointments. Pleasure, with syren voice, woos him on 'one side, into the ways of dalliance ; while on the other, labor points him to the rugged steeps where knowledge and virtue hold their chosen seats. Ease has its seductions, and just in proportion as his aims are high, does he know them to be difficult of attainment ; but in making the nobler choice, in taking the first resolute step in the right direction, he has already conquered more than half the obstacles that lie in his way to success. *To dare* and *to do*, stand in much closer proximity than is generally supposed ; for the experience of the world shows that there are few enterprises which intelligence, united with a clear purpose and a strenuous, determined will, cannot accomplish.

Intellect, mind, that faculty or assemblage of faculties, by means of which man acquires knowledge and applies it to useful purposes, is his peculiar possession ; and the improvement of which this distinguishing attribute is susceptible, as well as the great results it is capable of achieving, should inspire him with a high conception of the dignity of his nature, and the great ends of his being. It is by this means, that he con-

trives, invents, and discovers; imagines and creates; traces the relations between cause and effect, analyses what is compound, and from the observation of particular facts, rises to the comprehension of general laws. The results of this intellectual agency are all around and about us in such a rich and various profusion of shapes that, like old familiar things, they do not sufficiently impress our attention. How wonderfully are they displayed, for example, in the curious workmanship of the hand, fashioning things of use and of beauty; in the construction of machines for the economy of time and the multiplication of power, combining the utmost force with the most delicate nicety and skill; in the clearing of forests, the building of cities, and the binding of masses of men together under governments and into great communities; in the mastery acquired over the forces of nature, so that they are not only disarmed in a great measure of their power of mischief, but are rendered subservient to the daily uses of life; in the rapid, far-reaching and wide-spreading interchange of thought, intelligence and commodities, but lately rendered more perfect by a skilful appropriation of the powers of steam and electro-magnetism; and in all the numberless arts and appliances which give comfort, elegance and refinement to civilized society. There too, are those exquisite productions of poets, orators and philosophers, which are for the instruction and delight of mankind in all time; and though last not least in the scale of importance, the wonderful discoveries of that science, which not content with revealing the hidden things of earth, has winged its way into the clear upper sky, and brought to light the laws and influences which govern the movements of myriad circling worlds far beyond the reach of the

unassisted eye. Certainly there is something sublime in a collective view of these realizations of thought, these displays of creative intellectual power, but we must not forget, that however grand and imposing in the mass, they are but the successive and accumulated contributions of individuals to the common stock of human knowledge. Revelation has been made after revelation, conquest has been achieved after conquest, and improvement has been added to improvement, as the wants of man seemed to require them; and inasmuch as these wants by a law of his nature increase and multiply at every step of his progress, they operate as a perpetual stimulus to the exercise of his faculties for the supply and gratification of his desires. A great king of antiquity is said to have wept because he could find no more worlds to conquer, but no philosopher has ever been heard to complain that he could extend no further the boundaries of knowledge. It is a piece of signal beneficence in the Divine economy, that in the wide realms of thought and science, there are always new ideas to be evolved and new agencies to be discovered; new fields to be cultivated, and new laurels to be won.

The consciousness of possessing, in a greater or less degree, faculties such as I have described, so admirable in themselves, and so fitted to accomplish great results, should inspire the young adventurer in life with the determination of tasking them to the full term and limit of their ability. To what end has he been placed, with such glorious endowments, in the midst of this throng of thinking and active beings, if it be not that he may give "a true account of his gift of reason to the use and benefit of men." True, it is not the portion of all to speak with the tongue of eloquence, to

scale the heights of invention, or to leave the impress of their genius upon the times in which they live ; but all may rightly use and diligently employ the talents committed to their care, and in so doing, they will have fulfilled their mission here in all faithfulness and honor.

The love of praise and distinction is an instinct of the soul, vindicating its native excellence. It is an aspiration after something higher; and however dim or vaguely defined the sentiment may be in the breasts of some, it is at all times, eminently worthy of encouragement and respect. In obedience to this common sentiment, almost all young men begin their career in life by placing before them some ideal of excellence, some mark of ambition which they aspire or hope to reach. And this is commendable and right ; but how few, alas ! have the courage and consistency of purpose to work their way up to the goal proposed, to "scorn delights, and live laborious days," to encounter the toils, privations and sensuous self-denials, which are the necessary conditions of success. And yet the labor of intellectual culture carries with it its own rich recompense ; for as the painter or sculptor sees with ecstasy the ideals of his fancy take beneath his hand shapes of life and beauty to enchant the world, so does the student, with kindred emotions of delight and conscious power, feel within him the stirrings and the growth of those glorious intelligences that make him "in apprehension, so like a God." We crave excitement ! But what excitements are there more pure, genial and durable than those that accompany the pursuit of truth ! The grosser pleasures of sense are tumultuous, but short lived ; they perish in the using, and leave no worthy memorial behind ; but to master an idea or a system, to light upon a happy discovery, to



proclaim a new truth, or elaborate a great principle, affords as real and permanent, and oftentimes as intense gratification as any within the compass of human enjoyment. The rapturous exclamation of Archimedes, as he rushed from the bath in which he had solved the problem of Hiero's crown, is familiar to all students. When Kepler discovered the great law that fixes the relation between the periods and distances of the planetary bodies, he fell into the transports of what he calls a "sacred fury," and, in the lofty confidence of assured immortality, he exclaimed, "The book is written, to be read either now or by posterity, I care not which; it may well wait a century for a reader, when God has waited six thousand years for an observer!" And Milton who lost the use of his eyes in writing his noble *Defensio pro populo Anglicano*, has expressed in lofty and immortal verse, the high and proud consolation, bordering almost upon exultation, which he derived from the consciousness that those "idle orbs" had been bereft of light, in the service of no unworthy cause:

" Yet I argue not  
Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot  
Of heart or hope; but still bear up and steer  
Right onward. What supports me, dost thou ask?  
The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied  
In liberty's defence, my noble task,—  
Of which all Europe rings from side to side.  
This thought might lead me thro' the world's vain mask,—  
Content, though blind, had I no better guide."

There is much in the temper of the times and the country in which we live, to admonish us of the value of early and adequate preparation for the business of life. The present is what may be called in homely, but expressive phrase a *fast* age; and in this country particularly, the unexampled rapidity of our progress

in all the elements of national greatness has communicated to the people a fervor and restlessness of spirit that will not be content with any but the shortest and most summary modes of arriving at results. The magical doings of steam and magnetism have infected them; they cannot abide the slow processes of former days, however sure; their plans and enterprises must spring to maturity, like the prophet's gourd, in a single night. They have so often seen the wild imagination of yesterday become the reality of to-day, that they have come to regard nothing as extravagant, and to put implicit faith in the efficacy of adventurous daring. The desire to accomplish is equalled only by the anxiety to begin. So vast is the area of our country, so boundless its resources and opportunities, and so open and accessible to all, by means of its free popular institutions, are the avenues which lead to the general objects of desire—wealth, power, social and political position, that our young men step forward upon the stage of action, with an alacrity and confidence that are apt to make them undervalue those habits of patient discipline, of earnest, faithful and continuing industry which lie at the bottom of all great and well-merited distinction. Enterprise and self-reliance are excellent qualities in youth; they are elements of great force, whether considered in their influence upon the formation of personal character, or upon the interests of society at large. But the young man who nourishes the hope of effecting something beyond mere transient popularity or temporary success, who is animated with the desire of building up a reputation which shall live after him, and be to his children at once a heritage and an example, must set out with the conviction and persevere in it to the end, that whatever may be the

natural quickness of his parts, Self-cultivation, the full and systematic development of his mind and resources is not the short labor of a day or a year, but the progressive work of a life-time ; and that without this discipline and preparation faithfully performed, no solid or enduring excellence can ever be achieved. Even Genius, with its rare and transcendent qualities, cannot subsist altogether on its own resources ; without the material which study supplies, its fires pale away and often die out from sheer exhaustion. Much less can Talent, the more common and mechanical, but in the main, not less useful endowment, expect to achieve any thing of consequence, without the aid of persevering labor.

The self-cultivation of which I speak, does not consist altogether in what is commonly called learning. There are other teachers than books, and other schools than those in which masters and professors are to be found. Life has its unwritten lessons, of deeper import than human lore ; and what nobler school can there be to him who uses it right, than this many-colored world with its living manners, and its rich and diversified experiences. That which is daily and hourly enacted before our eyes, is but an epitome of the general history of men and things. The same motives actuate, the same hopes inspire, the same passions agitate, and the same deeds are done here as elsewhere, now and in all time. Though always one, in essence, human nature has yet an endless variety of manifestations from the varying circumstances to which it is subjected in life. To understand this nature in the race as well as the individual, and to comprehend the causes and principles which prevail in the regulation of human affairs, searching self-study, and a large,

accurate and generalizing observation are equally necessary. There is a world within, that answers to the world without; and the short aphorism of the Greek philosopher, *Know thyself*, embraces in its spirit a knowledge far deeper, broader and more universal than its terms would seem to imply.

Let me not be understood however, as seeking to disparage the value of college learning. Happy is he who enjoys its advantages and puts them to the proper account. These studies, if pursued in the right spirit, and especially that of the ancient classics, of those two languages which, though dead, yet speak to us with the voice of many centuries, and of those great masters of thought and composition who still maintain the magical sway they have so long exercised over the hearts and understandings of men, will cultivate his taste, store his mind with noble imagery, give scope and strength to his argumentative faculties, and fire his soul with those heroic breathings of freedom which have been to mankind, in all ages and climates, the source of hope and inspiration and fortitude to do and to suffer in the mortal struggles between liberty and power from which the world is never altogether free. There is no force in the objection that these are dead languages. A great man, statesman, philosopher or hero, may die, and must die,—but his spirit and character, his principles and actions live forever, as a study and example to men. In the same sense, and for the same purposes, the model languages of Greece and Rome, although no longer spoken, survive and will survive, because instinct with living thoughts, as fresh and beautiful, as profound and true, now as in the days of their utterance. But in these, as in all other studies, real knowledge is not to be found on the surface; like

truth, it must be sought for at the bottom of the well. The art of all study, and indeed the great business of education is, not merely to *accumulate* knowledge, but to *appropriate* it thoroughly,—to incorporate what we learn with our intellectual nature, and make it part and parcel of our intellectual being. To this end, the higher faculties of comparison, reasoning and judgment must be brought to bear, actively and constantly, upon the facts and things, with which reading and observation have made us acquainted. It is through the agency of these higher faculties, in their processes of analysis and generalization, that the information received through the senses, is converted into mind, like food into blood,—thereby giving to the whole mental system, a healthy and vigorous action, quickening and expanding its natural powers, and enabling its possessor, by the sure and prompt application of these powers, to determine and to act, with almost unerring certainty, in the various and complex exigencies of human life. It is knowledge so prepared, assimilated and rendered life-like and available, which constitutes *power*; which is the parent of all decisive and efficient action; and of which, Lord Bacon speaks so nobly, when he says: “the commandment of knowledge is yet higher than the commandment over the will; for it is a commandment over the reason, belief and understanding of man, which is the highest part of the mind, and giveth law to the will itself; for there is no power on earth, which setteth up a throne or chair of state in the spirits and souls of men, and in their cogitations, imaginations, opinions and belief, but *Knowledge and Learning*.”

The choice of a vocation is an epoch in the life of a young man. However heedless or indolent his previous course may have been, this important step should

never be taken without a full estimate of its bearing upon his future destiny. The incurring of new and weighty responsibilities has not unfrequently arrested men in a career of levity, and called out into sudden and vigorous exercise, powers of which they were before unconscious and unsuspected. "No more of these fooleries now," said Frederick the Great upon his accession to the throne, to his old favorites who were luxuriating in the anticipated continuance of their former idle dissipations; and Charles XII of Sweden, on a like occasion, although a mere boy in years, is said to have astounded his grey-headed counsellors, by the sudden and wonderful transformation his character underwent. A young man when about to assume the manly gown and enter upon the arena of active life, should feel like some worthy Prince when called to his inheritance of a crown. "The world is all before him, where to choose;" and inasmuch as this choice of a pursuit for life, involves duties which do not terminate in himself alone, but extend through all his relations "from dust to deity," it is matter of great concern that it be made wisely and well. A mere preference for one calling over others, is by no means a reliable test of capacity for its successful prosecution. This preference is often suggested by fashion, caprice, association; or other accidents and circumstances of a transitory character. There is for instance, a very strong proclivity among us to the learned professions, from an idea that they are of superior respectability, and that they open a short and easy way to emolument and honors. Hence the number of mere supernumeraries, of idle unproductive consumers—"fruges consumere nati,"—who hang upon the skirts of the professions, like camp followers upon the rear of an advancing army. When

a good merchant is lost in an unskilful doctor, or an excellent mechanic in an indifferent lawyer, the loss is two-fold—to the community as well as to the individual. How poor must that spirit be, how meagre that ambition, which instead of putting the thewes and sinews of the physical man, at least, to a good account, can content itself with occupying an undistinguished place upon the long and melancholy roll of “briefless barristers,” or with rejoicing in a diploma which is generally regarded as little better than a license to jeopard human life. No ! it is the man that illustrates the calling ; not the calling, the man. There is no office or employment so high, that it can give respectability to ignorance or indolence ; nor is there any so low, that it can detract from the dignity of intelligent, faithful and virtuous endeavor. Follow the bent of your genius ; but that you may not be deceived or misled, first institute an honest and thorough scrutiny into your natural aptitudes, your qualifications of body and mind, for the pursuit proposed. Interrogate Nature in good faith, and in this, as in all other matters, she will respond to your questionings, with a fidelity and truth, upon which you may safely rely.

But whatever the vocation, let it be your great aim to acquire a mastery over it. Fix your standard of attainment high, and work up to it with the faith and hope, the dauntless courage and untiring activity which belong to earnest and aspiring natures. Youthful energy is an agent of mighty power ; and when fired by a pure love of excellence, is capable of achieving magnificent results. *What indeed can it not accomplish?* Facing difficulties, and making sport of obstacles ; cutting down the mountains, and raising up vallies that lie in its course ; bounding on, in all the rapture of suc-

cessful strife, from one victorious conflict to another, it moves right onward and upward in its proud career, with its unblenching eye ever fixed upon higher summits of achievement, and

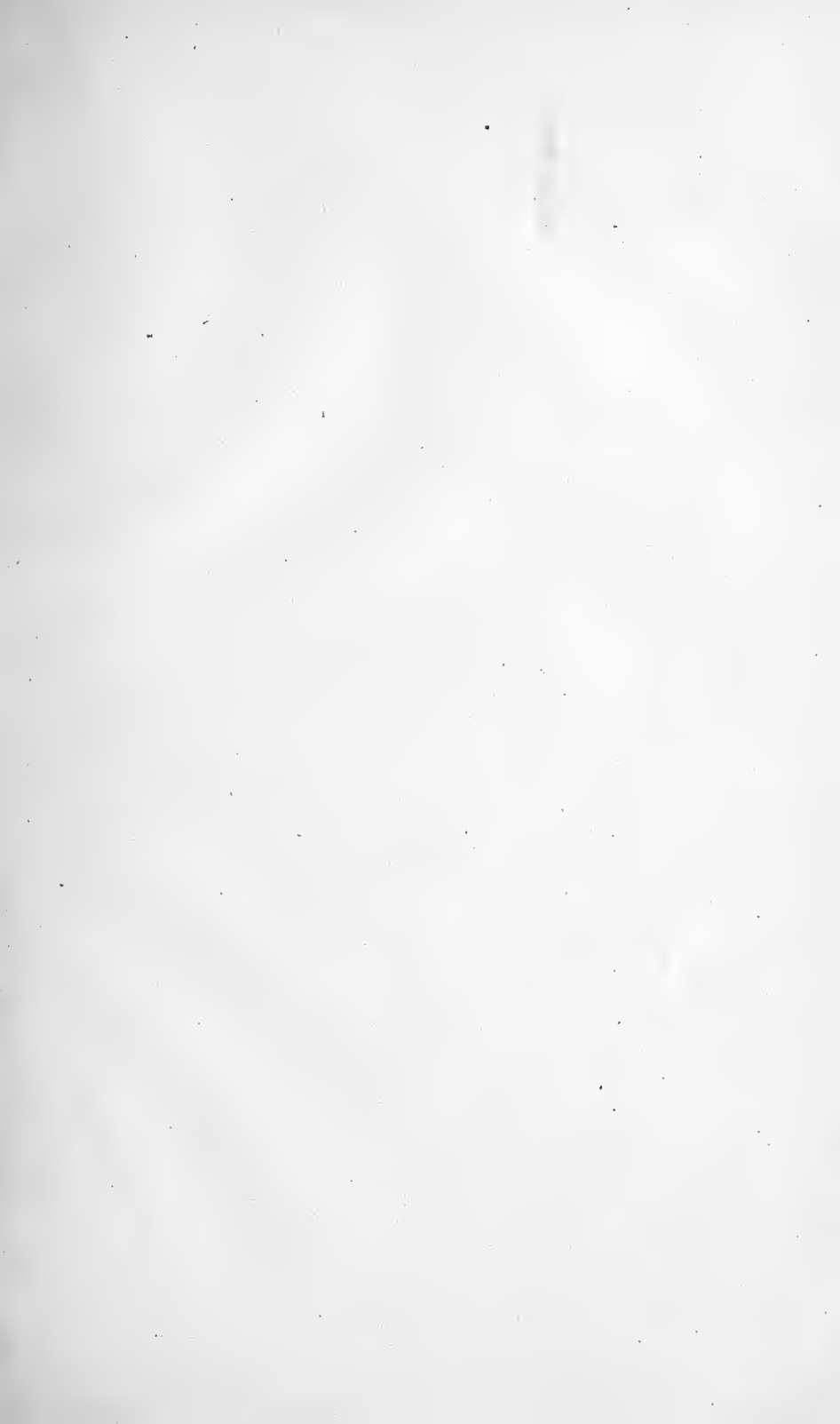
“ All the crooked paths  
Of time and change disdaining, *takes the range*  
*Along the line of limitless desires.*”

Young men! be true to the immortal principle of progress that lies folded up within you. Cultivate your whole spiritual being,—heart, intellect and soul. Carry forward with you into the powers, and duties and struggles of manhood, the feelings of boyhood;—its joyous bouyancy of spirit; its fresh and unwearying ardor; its love of the right and the true; its warm and gushing sensibilities that leap at every touch of kindred nature; its full, free, and glorious affections, that like the knights of old, go forth into the world in search of worthy objects, whereon to lavish all the wealth of their charities. So only can you expect to be happy; so only hope to be good and great!

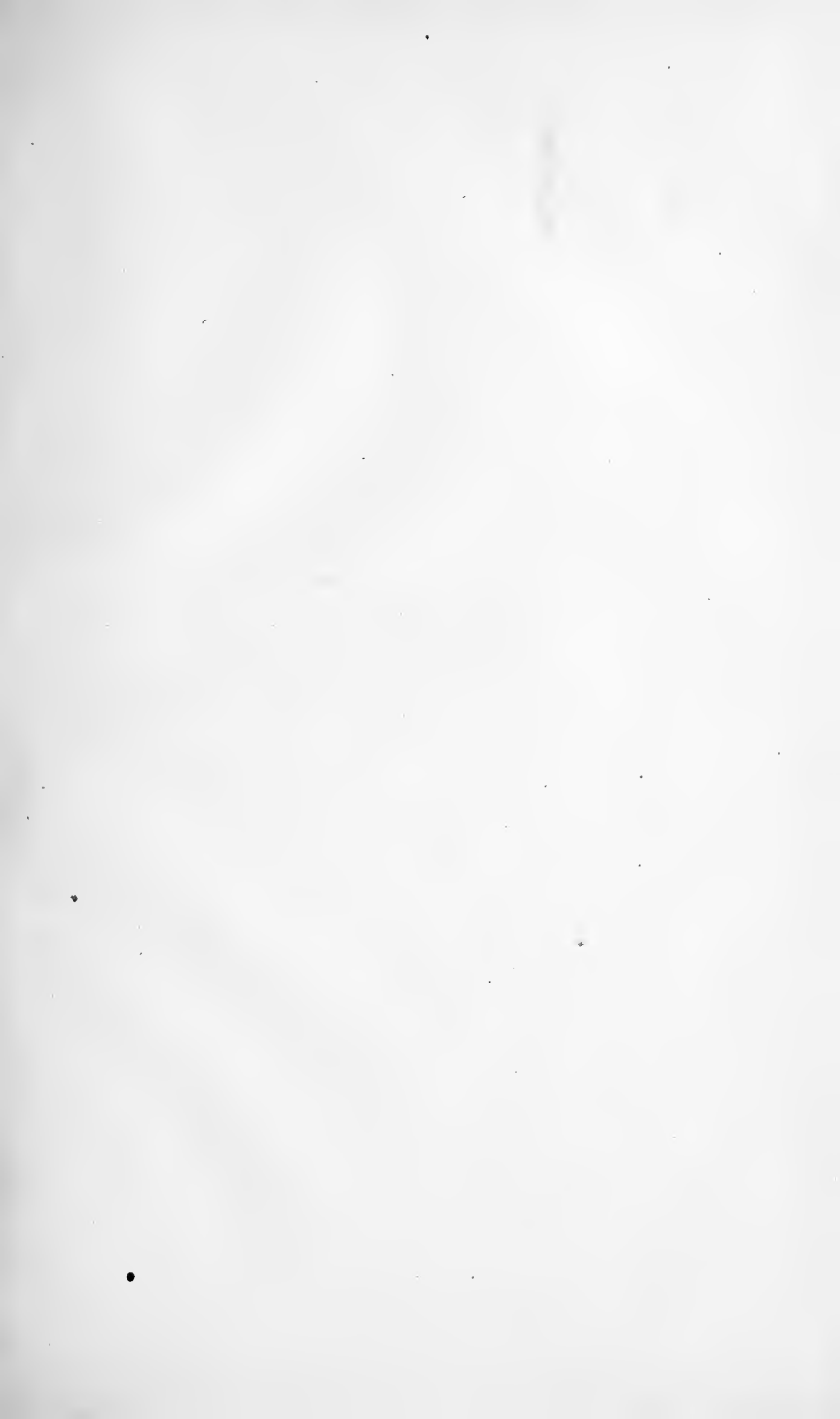


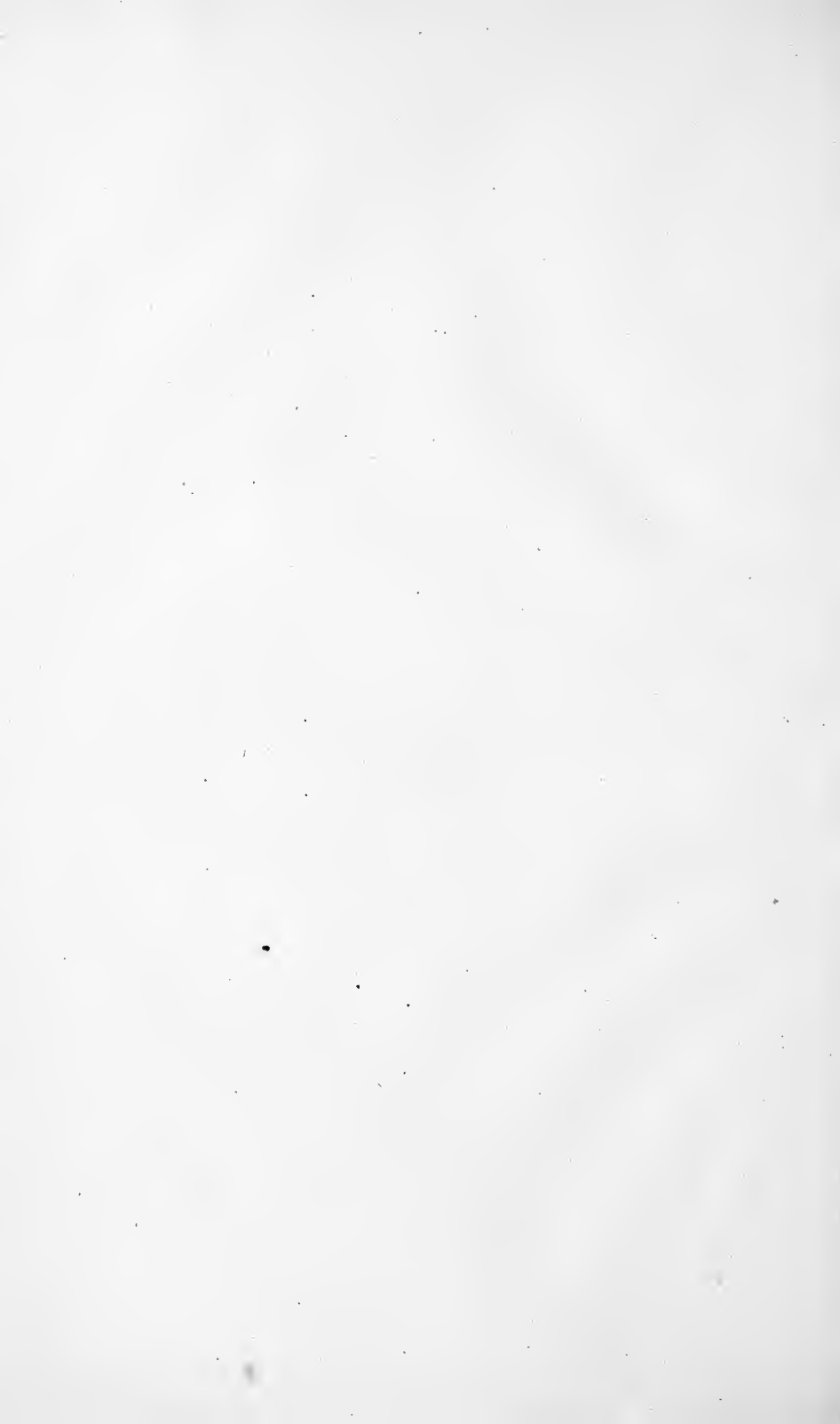


















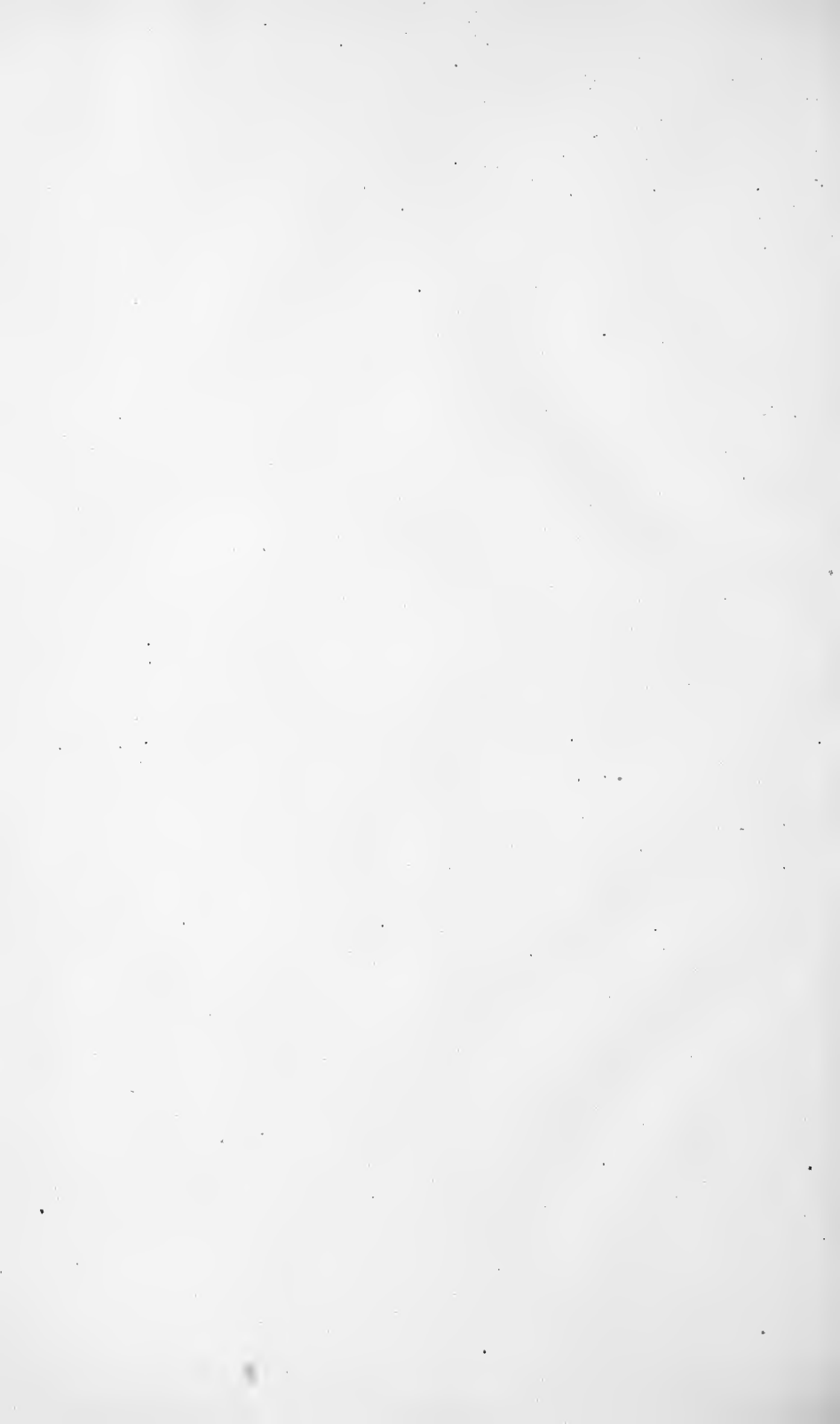










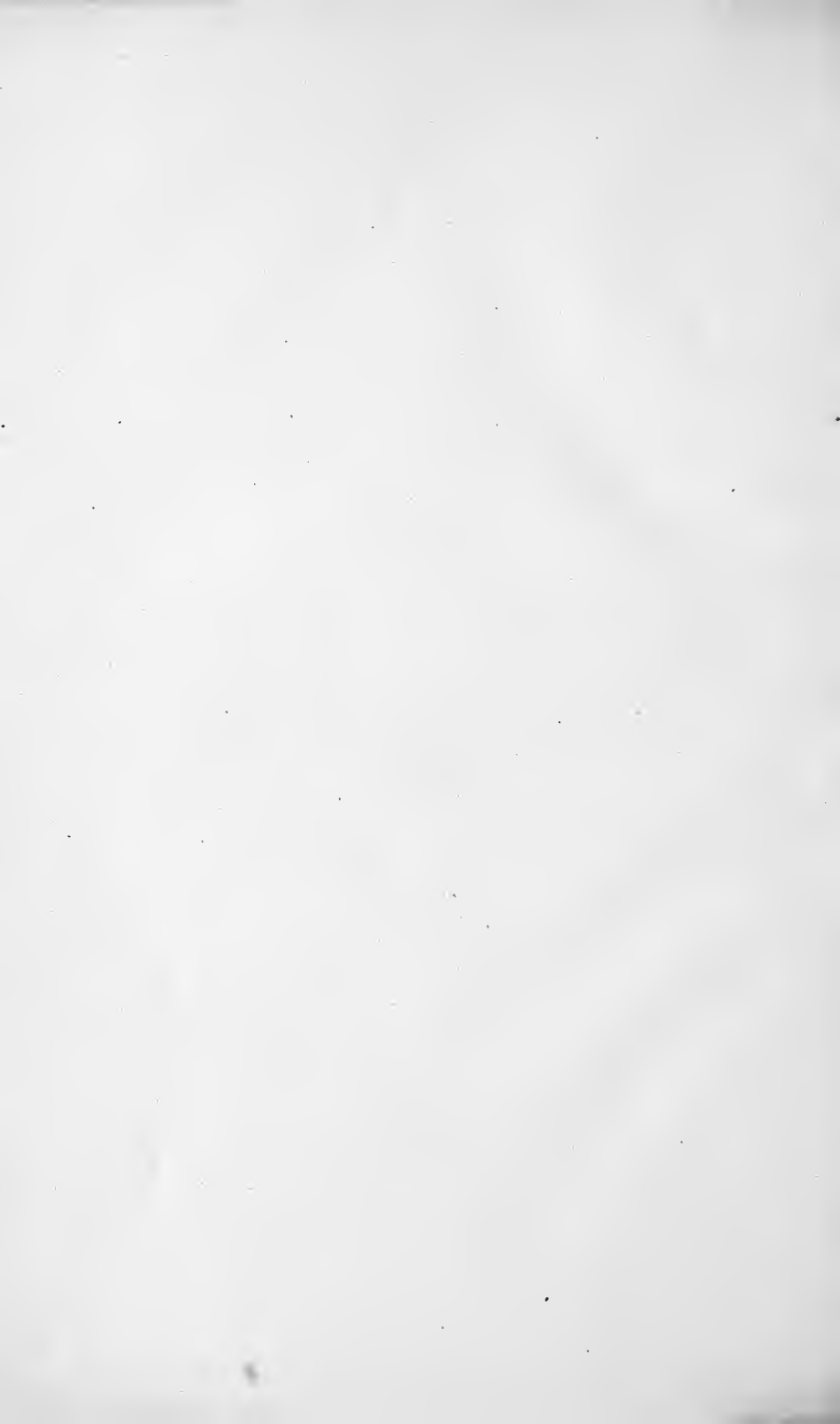




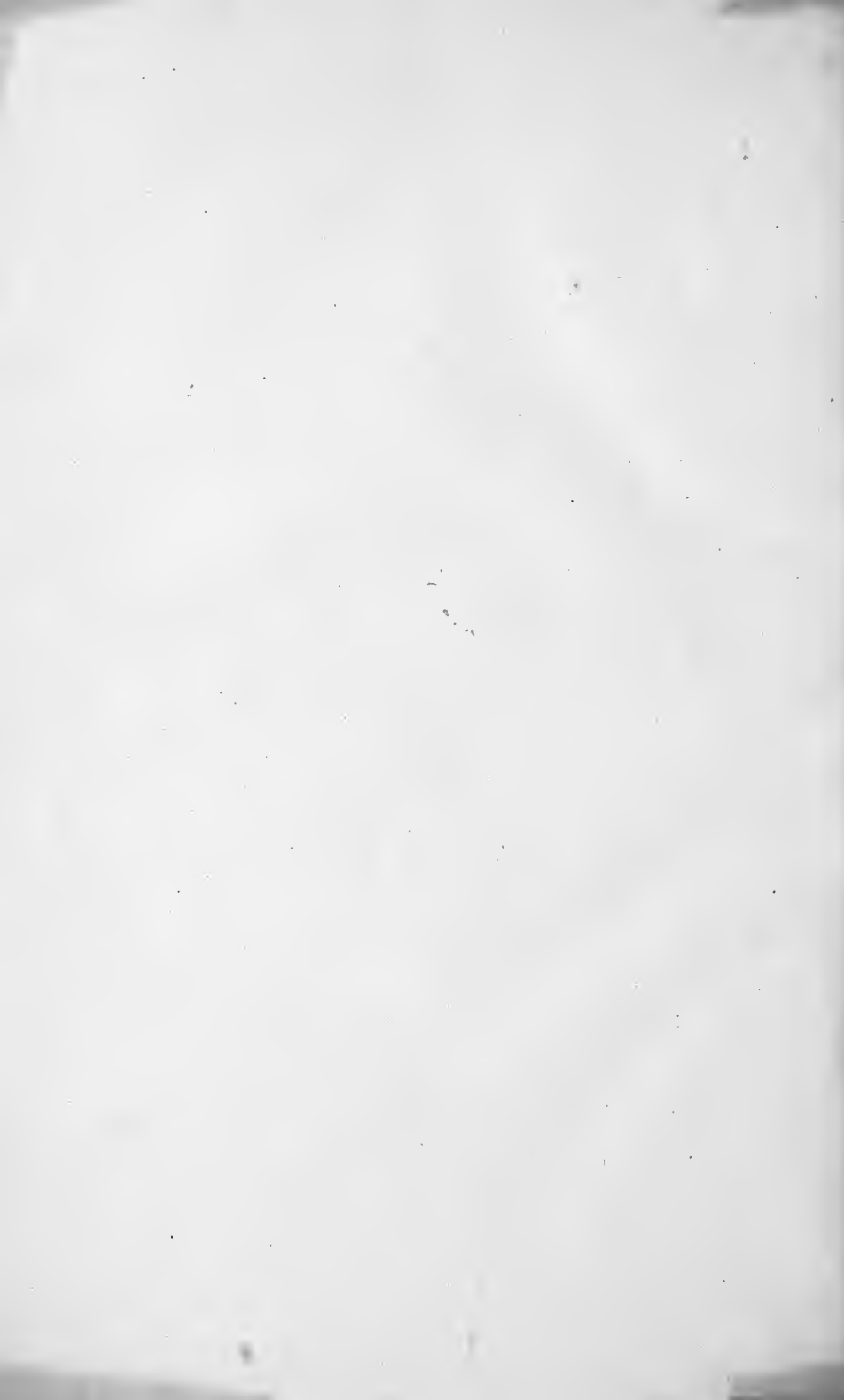














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